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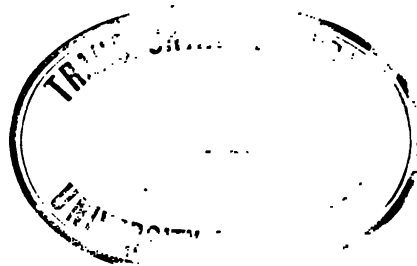
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# GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

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A  
CANDID EXAMINATION,  
OF THE  
*Origin and Management,*  
OF WHAT IS CALLED THE  
INLAND LETTER-CARRIER'S  
*Superannuated Fund.*

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In which, the necessity of adopting a better system than now prevails will be made manifest, from the example of an unfortunate individual: and which, above all, a vast public interest, loudly demand. At a time like this, when new and immense Public Buildings, at an enormous expense, are in contemplation, to give EXTERNAL SPLENDOR to the Post-Office establishment, a fair and dispassionate investigation of the REGULATIONS WITHIN, with which the public are infinitely more concerned, cannot but be deemed peculiarly reasonable.

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BY A  
*FRIEND TO IMPARTIAL JUSTICE.*

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London:

PRINTED BY B. BENNETT,  
17, SHERRARD STREET, GOLDEN SQUARE.

1815.

Price, 1s. 6d.

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## ***INTRODUCTION.***

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The history of the humble individual, whose misfortunes are recorded in the following pages, can be of little importance to the public; yet, as he has left a widow and five children, with another child by a former wife, four of whom, with the mother, are involved in the deepest distress, it may not on their account be deemed censurable, to give the reader of feeling, a slight sketch of the character of the husband and father.

Early in 1788, when in his thirty-sixth year, William Wood was, by the recommendation of the late Earl of Hardwicke, appointed a Letter-Carrier to the General Post-Office, and continued in that situation, till 1814, including the long period of nearly twenty-seven years. During the whole of that time, he conducted himself with the greatest propriety; his diligence and integrity had procured him the confidence and approbation of his superiors in the office, and his mild temper and obliging manners, had

equally gained him the universal respect and good opinion of all ranks of customers within the range of his walk.

In private life, he was most exemplary, both as a husband and a father—nothing delighted him so much as the comforts of his own fire-side, when after the fatigues of the day, he reposed in the bosom of his family. His children were the peculiar objects of his anxious and unceasing care; and except the youngest, an infant boy, had all received an early, and excellent education. It was this rare and habitual attention to the instruction of his children, and to the happiness of his family, that had long attracted the notice, and procured for him the esteem of many of the most respectable characters of the parish of St. James, where he had been twenty years a reputable house-keeper.

With respect to the offence of which he was convicted, little need be said here, as it will be found tolerably explained in the following pages. A concise history of the case, may not however be deemed unacceptable, and can easily be given in a few words. Mr. Lansley, a Gentleman residing at Andover, on the 21st of November, 1818, remitted to his correspondent, a Mr. Wheatley, of Gough Square, London, a letter containing chiefly Andover Notes, to the amount of £120. This Letter never reached the hands of Mr.

Wheatley, and was undoubtedly secreted and stolen by some person connected with the Post-Office. These Andover Notes, were exchanged by the London Banker, where they were made payable. Out of these Bank of England Notes, so exchanged for the Andover ones, three were traced to the possession of Wood, a month after they were stolen. These three consisted of a one Fifteen, and two Five Pound, Bank of England Notes.

He was first indicted capitally for secreting and stealing the Andover Letter and its contents, and was acquitted. He was a second time tried for stealing, and found guilty. As he could not recollect from whom he had taken these Notes, it was impossible he should satisfactorily account for his being possessed of them. Here, it cannot, be denied that appearances were strongly against him, but as far as the writer of this is competent to judge of the nature of what should in just construction be deemed doubtful or decisive evidence, he is far from thinking that even such appearances are any thing like unequivocal proof of guilt, or indeed, at all inconsistent with perfect innocence.

Wood, like all other men in the same profession, was in the daily practice of taking Bank of England Notes of all kinds to a very considerable amount, and if he omitted the precaution of mark-

ing them, it was scarcely possible, after the lapse of a month, to recollect with certainty from whom he had taken them. To have connected him completely with the felony, something more than the mere proof of possession was undoubtedly wanting. Had the London Banker been able to recollect the person to whom he paid the Bank of England Notes in exchange for the Andover ones, such a circumstance could scarcely have failed in leading to the detection of the real thief: but this most important link in the chain of evidence, the London Banker, unfortunately for Wood, could not supply, he having no recollection, whatever, of the person from whom he had received the stolen Notes.

The guilt of Wood, therefore, appears to be involved in that sort of doubt, which a good character might have been supposed likely to turn to the advantage of the prisoner; and certainly no man placed at the bar of the Old Bailey ever received a better one, from no less than eleven persons of undoubted credit and respectability. It is by no means meant here, in the slightest degree, to impute intentional error to the jury, much less, to question the purity of those motives which dictated their verdict of guilty. They were a London jury, composed of twelve honest men, who, doubtless, decided according to their consciences.

No man can venerate more than the writer of this, the sacred institution of juries: but to suppose they are not infallible, is neither to detract from their character nor their utility. Imperfection, more or less, is, alas! the common lot of humanity, from which, even the wise and good cannot plead exemption. Wood himself, lived and died in the solemn declaration of his innocence: he went further—for those who were in his confidence, well know, that to the last, he had a strong suspicion of a certain individual. It was from that declaration and this suspicion, uttered and retained in his dying moments, coupled with the recollection of his former spotless life, that induced the writer, in compliance with Wood's pressing request, to promise to do his utmost to rescue his name and memory from reproach, by tracing, if possible, the actual criminal.

Three bank notes only having been traced to Wood, amounting in the whole to 25*l*. the reader will perceive that there must still be 95*l*. in notes, either concealed, or in circulation. An enquiry was therefore set on foot, and every effort made in November last, to discover by some of these notes, the real offender. This was soon, however, found to be an arduous and difficult undertaking; for, though several of these very notes had then been paid into the



Bank, they had been received in large payments from private Bankers, and as a whole year had elapsed since they were stolen, the person engaged in the pursuit, had proceeded but a few stages in the investigation, when he lost the clue, from the want of recollection on the part of some of those who had been intermediate holders of such notes. It is justly due here to Mr. Wheatly, the prosecutor, to say, that no man could be more humanely anxious to sift the matter to the bottom, than himself. He took every possible pains to assist in coming at the truth, and had some other parties been equally communicative, the search had probably been more successful. Mr. Parkins too, the Solicitor to the Post Office, who had previously been engaged in the same pursuit, very readily supplied the names and address of two persons, one in Oxford Street, and the other at Rotherhithe, to both of whom were traced one of the 5*l*. notes. This discovery, however, proved also unavailing, for neither of them could be brought to recollect from whom they had received them.

Every enquiry having thus proved fruitless, the writer of this, agreeable to his promise, made to Wood, when the latter was on his death-bed, endeavoured to procure some relief for his wretched family, from what is called the

**Letter-carrier's Fund.** Wood clearly foreseeing his speedy dissolution. had put into the hands of the writer of this, an account of the origin and management of the fund, from which it appears, that his own subscriptions amounted to nearly 830*l*. This and other papers connected with the same subject, were accompanied by two letters in the hand-writing of Wood, one addressed to the Earl of Chichester, Post-Master General, and the other to Mr. Alderman Wood. From all these documents, it appeared to the writer at least, that his unfortunate wife and children had a strong and equitable claim on a fund, to which he had paid so much, without ever having received a shilling in return. This view of the matter, will explain the writer's motives for engaging in the following correspondence, which it is presumed, will bring the whole subject fairly under review. Though the writer of this, on account of the suffering family of Wood, deeply laments the rejection of the widow's petition, and though he can neither subscribe to the justice of such proceeding, nor to the reasons brought in support of it; yet it is but fair to acknowledge, that the gentlemen of the Post-Office have evinced no disposition to withhold information, but on the contrary. have, with frankness and candour, furnished the materials, which will enable any

man of common sense, to form an opinion of his own, on a subject, at least, as much connected with public interest, as with private distress.

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The following Letters and Petition while they will be found to develop the nature of the Letter-Carrier's Fund, will also distinctly shew the steps taken to procure relief for the distressed family of Wood from that source, and which, though not successful, the party interfering always thought, and still thinks, deserved success.

SIR,

I am persuaded, where misfortunes not produced by crime, fall heavy on any person, you will agree with me, that such an individual is an object of compassion. But when I inform you that I am, from motives of humanity, interfering in behalf of a distressed female, the legal mother of five children, four of whom, are from their tender years helpless and dependent, it would look like an insult, to suppose that any motive can be wanting to induce you to look with anxiety into the nature of a case, that appeals so powerfully to our best feelings.

There is a person of the name of William Wood, many years a Letter Carrier under your inspection, now in Newgate, convicted of a crime, with the character of which, you are fully

acquainted. On the justice of that conviction, it is not for me to hazard an opinion. The verdict of a Jury has recorded his guilt, and unless I knew more of the unhappy transaction than I do at present, I bow as it becomes me, to that solemn decision. But with his guilt or innocence it is not my present purpose to concern myself. He has it seems, during the period of fourteen years, paid into a Fund, said to be raised for the support of aged and infirm Letter Carriers, and of which it is understood you have the management, a sum amounting to nearly £830. If it is supposed that legal proceedings have cancelled *his* claims on this Fund;—is there after all no compassion due to an irreproachable wife and four innocent helpless children, reduced from a decent condition of life, to the extreme of want and wretchedness? Picture to yourself a Wife and a Mother, as respectable in both characters as any woman of her rank in society,—reduced to sell the bed that she and her children have reposed on, to supply for a time the mere cravings of hunger. Let it be recollected also, that after keeping a house with credit for upwards of twenty years in one parish, she and her children, will in a very few days, be turned out of doors, without the smallest provision for either back or belly, except the chilling charity of a workhouse. You will observe, I am not now looking at the legality of your retaining £830 from Wood. As the

wife and children are innocently involved in his dreadful fate, it should be considered, so far as they are concerned, only as a question of equity, —as a point of feeling,—as a matter of humanity. Really I cannot bring myself to believe, that the persons placed at the head of the Post Office establishment, will be much inclined to countenance a procedure, so much at variance with honest dealing and upright character. The public too, are not a little concerned in this business. It is reported that you have taken a contribution of 15s. a week, out of a salary of 14s. towards the support of this Fund. Now, this must be a mistake—because such a system can only be supported by levying on the public, either in the way of *perquisite* or *plunder*, while it exposes men to temptations, which no common honesty can resist. Upon the whole, as you are the chief (if not the only) person concerned in the formation and management of the Letter Carrier's Fund, I have thought it most respectful to address to you this first application in behalf of this unhappy woman and her wretched children and whether I shall take any other steps in so heart-rending a business, will depend on the answer, which I reckon on receiving from you without loss of time.

I am Sir, &c.

BENJAMIN CRITCHETT, Esq.

September 28, 1814.

Inspector of Letter Carriers.

The above Letter was answered by Mr. Critchet, Inspector of Letter-Carriers, soliciting a personal interview with the writer. At this interview, which took place at the time appointed, Mr. Stowe, the Comptroller, in the politest manner, took much pains to convince the writer of the erroneous views taken of the fund, in the Letter. It is enough to say here, that the representations of the Comptroller, were more intelligible than satisfactory, but as they are the same as those contained in a subsequent Letter from Mr. Secretary Freeling, they will be found answered, in the conclusion of the pamphlet.

*To the Right Honorable the Earl of Chichester  
Post Master General.*



## THE PETITION OF MARIA WOOD,

HUMBLY SHEWETH,

THAT your Petitioner having to complain of misfortunes and misery, seldom paralleled in the history of human suffering, and which in a great measure may be traced to a cause over which the Post Master General has the supreme controul, she respectfully solicits your Lordship's most earnest attention to the following facts, which constitute her lamentable case.

Your Petitioner's late husband William Wood, had been for nearly twenty-seven years a Letter-Carrier in the General Post office, and during the whole of that long period had maintained a character for diligence and probity in his station unsullied and unsuspected. In the month of November, 1813, he had the Temple Walk, where, in the course of collecting moncy, he took one Fifteen and two Five-Pound Notes, which were a month afterwards traced to him, and which proved to have been exchanged for part of a packet of Andover Notes that had been stolen, amounting in the whole to £120. Your Petitioner's unfortunate husband, from the lapse of time, and from his daily practice of taking notes of all descriptions, was unable to recollect from whom he took them, was found guilty, and sentenced to seven year's transportation.

Though the assertion of innocence after a legal conviction, may in most cases be thought of little avail, yet your Petitioner owes it to the memory of the best of husbands, and to his Six Fatherless children, to submit to your Lordship her reasons for attributing his melancholy fate to misfortune, and not to crime. In the first place he was not a Letter-sorter, and the Letter containing the Andover Notes being directed to Gough Square, was not even within the range of his walk. In the second place, overlooking the improbability of a man who had sustained a spotless character

for upwards of sixty years, descending all at once, to the commission of a capital crime ;—Your Lordship ought to be informed, that he lived and died in the solemn declaration of his innocence, and however equivocal this kind of self-exculpation may be thought by some, yet in his case no man who knew him, will treat it lightly. In the third place, he had previous to this unfortunate event, solicited to be put on the superannuated pension list of £80. per Annum, which from his long service, his age, and his infirmities, he had a right to claim, and good reason to expect ; and can it be thought, that a man till then, universally respected and esteemed,—of sober habits, with a wife and six children, would not only put to risk the enjoyment of such a benefit, but of every other prospect of future happiness ? It may be asked, how could he in the ordinary course of business become possessed of the Notes given in exchange by the London Banker for the stolen Andover ones ? To answer this question satisfactorily is impossible,—it gives to the case no doubt a suspicious appearance, but while it is possible and even probable that he might receive them honestly, it can of itself decide nothing, on the simple fact of guilt or innocence. If all persons were to be hanged who cannot tell from whom they received Five, or even Fifteen Pound Notes, the trading population of this country would



soon be thinned. The thief who had resolution enough to steal and secrete the Letter, must have been a novice in knavery indeed, not to know how to dispose of the Notes ; and as it is clear from the evidence given on the trial, that the crime must have been committed by some person connected with the General Post Office, no plan of circulation could be more safe, and certainly none more artful, than to get them exchanged with a Letter Carrier, whose name appearing on the back of them, would fix upon him a strong suspicion of guilt. That some such trick was resorted to in this case, your Petitioner's unfortunate husband never ceased to believe, and indeed to the last, his suspicion attached to an individual, *whom under existing circumstances, it would be altogether improper to name.*

Your Petitioner, on this part of the subject, has only to add that her late unfortunatè husband sunk under the weight of his afflictions, and literally perished in Newgate of a broken heart ;—that whether he may still be deemed innocent or guilty, his death has entailed on her a complication of distress of no ordinary description. She had scarcely deposited in the earth his mortal remains, when her furniture was seized and sold for rent, and herself and four children wholly unprovided for, were expelled from the house which she had reputably kept for many years,

and but for the compassion of some humane individuals, she must have sought shelter and sustenance for herself and little ones in a Work-house. Since then, she, with all her children have been pent up in a single small room, where they must have starved, but for the charitable assistance received from the Letter Carriers, and from some excellent persons, who knew her in her better days.

Your Petitioner, has felt it to be her indispensable duty to submit these particulars to your Lordship's serious consideration not only to assist you in forming a right judgment on the causes and consequences of her unhappy case, but also to put you in possession of the strong and equitable grounds, on which she rests her claims to pecuniary assistance from the Letter-Carriers' Fund. Her late unfortunate husband had paid into this fund, during a period of fourteen years, very nearly the sum of 830*l.* without ever having received one shilling in return. During the first seven years he contributed four shillings per week, and in the last seven, at the enormous rate of 36*l.* per annum. The alteration in the mode and quantum of collection for the fund, took place in April 1807, and though the improvements and benefits likely to result from such an important change may have been known to the projec-

tors of the new system, yet they were so far from being obvious to the understanding of your Petitioner's late unfortunate husband, that he never could see any thing in the scheme but injustice and oppression, and he never spoke of it, but in the language of bitter complaint.

Your Petitioner being now about to state her late unfortunate husband's reasons for condemning the origin and management of the present superannuated Letter-Carrier's Fund, she implores your Lordship to weigh them fully and impartially, and bestow on them that deliberate consideration, which they will assuredly, be found to deserve. For a vast number of years, and up to 1807, in what are termed the farmed-walks, the Letter-Carriers who were allowed supernumeraries received from the latter a certain sum per annum, paid quarterly, which sum was fairly proportioned to the produce of the walk, and therefore varied in its amount from 80*l.* to 81*l.* yearly. This money was collected quarterly by the head Inspector, who was allowed for his trouble 6*d.* in the pound, and the whole managed with fairness and publicity. In the beginning of 1807, there were on the old establishment three Letter-Carriers superannuated, each of whom received 26*l.* per annum, and this fund was raised by a contribution, made exclusively by the Junior Letter-Carriers,

at the rate of four shillings per week. The names of these Junior Letter-Carriers were regularly stuck up in the Inspector's office, where every one concerned, had at all times a fair opportunity of acquainting himself with the total amount of receipts, and of their application. Such were the regulations which prevailed at the General Post-Office up to April 1807, and against this system not a murmur was heard,—all the Letter-Carriers, to a man, were contented. The benefits were as nearly as possible equalized, and the burthens fairly proportioned to the power to bear them. This system, which had so long and happily satisfied all persons, in any degree interested in its continuance, appeared, it seems to some gentlemen in the Post-Office, so very defective and imperfect, that they resolved, from the best of motives, no doubt, to introduce an entire new system. They began by forming something like an estimate of the gross sum produced yearly in each walk, including in their calculation the fourteen shillings a week the Letter-Carriers receive from the Crown, which is a permanent *income*, with the produce of his Letter-Bell, the little presents made him by quarterly houses for early letters, and the returns from his Christmas-Box, a species of *income* which must naturally be ever fluctuating and uncertain. Proceeding on this absurd, because

fallacious data, they levied such sum upon each walk, as they conjectured bore some proportion to its gross produce, varying from fifty pounds to even four yearly. This tax produced the first year, the sum of 2142*l.* leaving a surplus in the hands of the managers of no less than 600*l.*, more than could be possibly required by the superannuated list, and as this prolific source of annual supply has been kept open for seven years, it is quite clear, there ought now to be somewhere a surplus seven times larger than the last-mentioned sum, or in other words 4200*l.* Hitherto the statement proceeds on sure grounds, resting on solid facts that are susceptible of demonstration, but as to the application of this immense balance, thus wrung from the hard labour of a meritorious class of men, nothing can be known, for no board or paper is stuck up to account for the expenditure, and no Letter-Carrier is even permitted to enquire into its application;—any attempt to pry into a matter that so much concerns the Letter-Carriers, there is reason to believe, would by some means or other, be quickly succeeded by his dismissal.

Your Petitioner, need hardly point out to your Lordship, the absurdity and injustice of such a system. Income which is fixed and permanent, is blended with that which must be fluctuating and uncertain, and upon this irra-

tional basis an estimate is made, and an assesment arbitrarily levied, of upwards of two thousand pounds annually. In the next place, all other funds known in England, collected for similar purposes, whether called Tontines or Benefit Societies, have articles written or printed, which define the terms and explain the conditions on which the subscriber can claim relief. Here, and here only, all is uncertainty. No length of service,—neither age, infirmity, nor accident, give the poor Letter-Carrier any right to declare himself on the fund,—all depends solely on the caprice, and discretion of those who have been pleased to charge themselves with the management of the whole concern. It is a just and salutary maxim to annex responsibility to trust, and this has been universally adopted in every other case;—the stewards or trustees, are compelled by law to render at stated times, a faithful account to the subscribers of all monies received and expended on account of the fund, and to give security for the trust which the members have reposed in them. Of the Letter-Carriers' fund no account is ever rendered—there are no checks provided against possible abuse, while impunity is secured to possible cupidity. All other similar establishments are supported by the voluntary contributions of the members, but here, there is not a single

Letter-Carrier, from Wapping to Westminster, who does not execrate the power that compels him to support a fund, by which he deems himself plundered and oppressed. On its first establishment, the Letter-Carriers petitioned against it, and though they may be supposed to understand their own interests quite as well as the projectors of the new scheme, they petitioned in vain,

Your Petitioner need not remind your Lordship, that the public have a deep interest in the honesty of your Letter-Carriers. This is that view of the subject which in importance surpasses all others. They not only contribute to this fund, but what appears equally absurd and arbitrary, they are charged with the Income Tax, on only a regular salary of fourteen shillings per week. These grinding exactions have made nine-tenths of them so poor and distressed, that with the utmost frugality, they can scarcely maintain themselves, and find even bread for their children. They are placed in a situation where they are exposed to such temptations, as under even easy circumstances it might be held meritorious to resist, but which in a state of poverty and distress, it would be deemed almost miraculous to surmount. Justice and sound policy therefore, alike demand, that the men through whose hands so much public property

must daily pass, ought to have that sort of decent allowance which exempts them from the pressure of want, and diminishes the power of temptation. That such men should be made to look to perquisites as a source of supply is disreputable to the Post-Office, where public labour ought to be paid solely from the public purse, without any assistance from individual charity.

Your Petitioner has thus brought under your Lordship's consideration, the reasons which induced her late unfortunate husband, in common with every Letter-Carrier in the metropolis, to condemn the origin, plan, and management of the superannuated fund, and she confidently trusts, under all the circumstances of her distressing case, that your Lordship will be disposed to allow the propriety and justice of her claims on that fund,

And your Petitioner, as in duty bound,  
Will ever pray;

*December 30, 1814.*

NO. 2, ANGEL COURT,  
GREAT WINDMILL STREET,  
SAINT JAMES'S.



*December 30, 1814.*

My Lord, -

On the subject of Mrs. Wood's Petition, which accompanies this, I have a Letter in my possession addressed to your Lordship, in the hand-writing of her late husband, containing his reasons at length, for complaining of the Superannuated Letter-Carriers' Fund, but from certain informalities in its composition, I have dissuaded his Widow from sending it. Your Lordship ought also to be informed, that at the urgent request of Mrs. Wood, and in the lifetime of her husband, I made an application similar to that contained in the present Petition, to the Inspector and Comptroller, who declined granting her any relief whatever from the fund. I mention this merely to shew that, before I ventured to address myself to you as head of the department, I had previously sought relief, in vain, for this distressed family from the subordinate authorities of the Post-Office.

In addition to this fact, I may truly say, that poor Wood on his death-bed, bequeathed to me the trust of endeavouring to procure for his widow and helpless children, assistance from a fund on which he had so many equitable claims. This duty having thus devolved on me, I deem, sacred, and it shall therefore be faithfully performed in such a way, as shall appear to my

humble judgment the best adapted to the end in view, should it unexpectedly happen, that your Lordship declines interfering in a case, recommended to your justice and humanity by considerations, that so powerfully appeal both to the head and heart.

I am, my Lord,

[Your Lordship's Obedient Humble Servant.

The Rt. Hon. the Earl of Chichester, Post-Master General.



My Lord,—Fourteen days have now elapsed since I had the honour of addressing your Lordship a letter, accompanied by the Petition of Maria Wood, widow, both explanatory of the grounds of her claim, on what is called the Letter-Carriers' Fund. To this Letter, and to that Petition, no answer has been hitherto returned, and though, I have not the presumption even to suggest a hint on the important duties of Post-Master General, which you must so much better understand than any other person, yet as I am bound by solemn promise made to a man now slumbering in the dust, to make every possible effort to obtain something like justice for his widow and five fatherless children; I trust, before any public step is taken, you will not deem it an unpardonable liberty, if I express a hope, that you will at least have the official courtesy to acknowledge the receipt of the

Letter and Petition, whatever may be your opinion on the merits of their contents.

I am, my Lord, &c.

The Rt. Hon. the Earl of Chichester.      January 13, 1815.

Sir, It is now rather more than a month since I addressed a letter to the Earl of Chichester, as Post-Master General, accompanied with a Petition from Maria Wood, widow, and I have also a second time written since to his Lordship, on the same subject without having received any answer. Believing, from the important situation you hold in the Post-Office establishment, that the papers must have come under your inspection, I am desirous of knowing if any thing is intended to be done in the matter to which they relate, and I know of no mode more decorous, or more likely to prove effectual in procuring that information, than by direct application to yourself. It is with this view, and from a persuasion that such a subject, cannot in justice to the parties concerned, be allowed to sleep much longer, that I venture, respectfully to solicit, in the name of Widow Wood, an early answer, containing your determination on a point, on which the future subsistence of herself and children wholly depends.

I am, with respect, &c.

January 28, 1815.

Francis Freeling, Esq. General Post-Office.

General Post-Office, *Jan. 29, 1815*

Sir, The Letter and the Petition to the Earl of Chichester was duly received, and is before the Board. It has stood over for some personal discussion, and I hope in the course of a few days, to be enabled to write to you definitively upon it.

I am, Sir, &c. F. Freeling.

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General Post-Office, *Feb. 3, 1815.*

Sir, I am directed to acquaint you, that the Petition of Maria Wood, transmitted to Lord Chichester in your letter of the 30th of December, has been considered by the Board. It is unnecessary to state particular answers to the numerous allegations which the Petition contains against the management of the Inland Letter-Carriers' Fund. My Lords think it sufficient to inform you, that the late W. Wood, when capitally convicted at the Old Bailey, lost all claim to any provision from this office—that their Lordships, in no case granted allowances to widows and children, and therefore, can grant none to Maria Wood. As to the management of the sums produced, by assessing the Letter-Carriers' Walk, I am to state to you, that they constitute an official fund—it has nothing of the character which the Petition supposes of a Benefit Society or Subscription Fund. The Letter-

Carriers have no right to demand that the particulars shall be constantly submitted to their inspection. They know that the Post-Master General, in 1807, regulated the permanent value of each walk, so near as the same could be ascertained, in doing which, their Lordships had several public objects in view, and the Letter-Carriers, as a body, were materially benefitted by it. Each man is well aware, that he does possess the full profits of his walk, after the deduction at that time ordered for the purpose of graduating the incomes and establishing better means for pensioning those, who from age and infirmity became incapable of duty. The Post-Masters General, are ever ready to attend to petitions from such persons—the accounts of the Official Fund are laid before their Lordships at stated periods, who in the exercise of their discretion and responsibility, make such charges upon it for the maintenance of superannuated Letter-Carriers, as appear to them expedient. The Petition having laid great stress on the amount of money said to be paid by Wood, it may be right to observe, that it was no personal contribution from him. He possessed such an income as his place and rotation in the office entitled him to: what he had to pay over from the produce of the walks on which he was employed, was in no sense *his* money or profits, but

belonged to the general account, by which, both the incomes and the pensions are regulated.

I am, Sir, &c. F. Freeling, Secretary.



*Observations on Mr. Secretary Freeling's Letter.*

The above letter, in answer to Widow Wood's Petition, and which closes the correspondence, is much too sparing of explanation, to be any thing like satisfactory. On the main point, there runs through it not a little of that dignified reserve, calculated to give an air of mysterious importance to official compositions. On the rejection of the Petition, however, it is sufficiently explicit—it puts an end to all hopes of relief to this unfortunate family from the Post-Office. With those strong convictions on my mind, with which I have to struggle, it is impossible for me to concur in the opinions contained in this letter; and, as the community at large know nothing of the system which it defends, and have a deep interest in the integrity of the Letter-Carriers, I am inclined to think that, in fulfilling my promise to Wood, I am rendering some service to my country, by bringing the subject fairly before the public.

There are three parties comprehended in the scope of the Secretary's letter—there are Wood, the Letter-Carriers, and the Public. On each

of these, I shall bestow a few words. With respect to Wood, Mr. Freeling asserts that the sums taken from him towards this fund, was in no sense *his* money! If this were really the fact, there could be but little occasion for the Board taking near a month in discussing the Widow's claims on the fund, a circumstance admitted in Mr. Freeling's first letter to have occurred. The Petition might have been answered in a moment, by saying—"We have received no money belonging to your late husband, and you can therefore have no claim on us!" It would require something more, however, than this brief but pithy reply, to satisfy me, that Wood had no property in the money he paid into the Superannuated Fund. Let the case be correctly stated, and the public will be at no loss to judge which view of the matter is the more rational and just. Up to 1807, Wood contributed four shillings a week, or at the rate of ten pounds, eight shillings per year, to the old fund. This being the fact, nothing can be clearer than, that after deducting this sum and the income tax, the remaining profits of his walk, must in every just view, be considered as his own exclusive property. Now, by what authority could the Post-Master General, in the spring of 1807, levy the further sum of twenty-five pounds, twelve shillings, annually, on Wood's

walk, not only without his consent, but expressly against his will? If by custom, then the Post-Master General may take what he pleases from the Letter-Carrier ;—he may take fifty-five instead of twenty-five, or he may take the whole. Admit the right to take the property of another at discretion, and there can be no limits fixed for its exercise. A right to take on one side, without any right to refuse on the other, is as complete a definition of despotism and slavery as can well be conceived ; and is a system of oppression as repugnant to reason and justice, as it is to the feelings of Englishmen. Is there any statute law to warrant such a practice? If there is such an act of Parliament, it would, no doubt, have been noticed. I know of none : but I do know of one of another kind, which I shall presently quote, and which prescribes a course, very different from the one in question, in the management of all public offices.

I have said, that the sum of twenty-five pounds, twelve shillings, was taken from Wood in 1807, and continued to be taken from him for seven years afterwards, expressly against his will. To prove that I have not hazarded this assertion rashly, I have now before me a copy of a Petition, drawn up and presented to the Board in 1807, to which are affixed no less than 119 names,—that is, by 114 Letter-Carriers, being the whole regular



number employed in the London General Post-Office ; together, with the additional names of five of the Supernumeraries. In this Petition, these men (and Wood was one) repeatedly and earnestly protest against the injustice of the projected new system, and pray that it may not be established : and, though Mr. Freeling says, that the “ Post-Masters General are ever ready to attend to “ Petitions from such persons,” it produced in this instance, no other effect, than an intimation from the higher powers, that those who did not choose to submit to the new regulation, were at liberty, when they pleased, to leave their employments. This, then, being the case, Wood was compelled either to pay Twenty-five Pounds, Twelve Shillings more annually out of his walk ; or, at an advanced period of life, and after having been twenty years in the Post-Office, to throw himself, with a large family, entirely out of bread. Was this an alternative that left any choice ? Was it one to which an old faithful servant could by any authority be fairly reduced ? These are questions that require no reply,—they answer themselves. Indeed, from all I have seen, or heard, or read, I have met with nothing to convince me, that the Post-Master General had in *justice* any more right to seize on Wood’s income, than the latter had to a share of his Lordship’s salary,—in *equity*, he had far less, for being well

able to afford a part out of a large whole, without much inconvenience; the injury sustained would be but trifling,—whereas a large part out of a small whole, reduced the other, from competence to penury. The right to take on either side, without the consent of the parties, is equally absurd and unjust, and can neither be palliated by sophistry, nor concealed by evasion.

But what are the conditions or terms, on which an old Letter-Carrier can claim relief from this fund? Wood himself, in his sixty-second year, when his memory was well known to be greatly impaired,—when his constitution was broken down, and his health rapidly and visibly declining, solicited to be invalided and placed on the fund, after a twenty-seven years service in the Post-Office—and was *refused*. That this refusal was given, will not, and cannot be denied,—but why? is a question, the Secretary has forgotten to answer. It is clear, however, that where an undefined and discretionary power is lodged in any hands, it is but too apt to be abused. In dispensing favours, partiality will naturally lead to preference in the selection of objects. But this is not all, for it is perfectly possible, in the wanton exercise of this sort of power, to contrive some specious ground of complaint, that shall at once still the importunities of an unsuccessful candidate, and dismiss him from

the service. I do not say, that this is at all applicable to the case of Wood, but that man knows nothing of human nature, who does not see, that such an abuse naturally grows out of such a monstrous system. But, after all, I am much mistaken, if either the Post-Master General, or any other authority at the Post-Office, could have a just right, under all the circumstances of the case, to reject the application of Wood to be placed on the superannuated list. The following extracts from the Act of the 50th of George the Third, Cap. 117, seems pretty decisive on that point. The preamble runs thus:—

“Whereas it is expedient that an account of the  
 “increase and diminution of all public salaries,  
 “and of all pensions and allowances in the na-  
 “ture of superannuation or rewards for public  
 “services, should *be annually laid before Par-*  
 “*liament*; and that provision should be made  
 “for regulating and controuling the granting  
 “and paying of such salaries, pensions and al-  
 “lowances: Be it therefore enacted, &c. That  
 “between the First day of February and Twenty-  
 “Fifth day of March in every year, if Parliament  
 “shall be sitting during any part of such period,  
 “then within forty days after the commencement  
 “of the Session of Parliament in such year, there  
 “shall be laid before both Houses of Parliament,  
 “an account of every increase and diminution

“ which shall have taken place within the pre-  
 “ ceding year, ending on the First Day of Ja-  
 “ nuary, in the number of persons employed in  
 “ all public offices, or departments, or in the sa-  
 “ laries, emoluments, allowances, and expences  
 “ which may have taken place, or been paid,  
 “ granted, received, or incurred, for and in  
 “ respect of all offices, and persons belonging to  
 “ or employed in, or by, or in the service of all  
 “ public offices or departments, specifying the  
 “ amount and nature thereof, and distinguishing  
 “ in such account every increase and diminution  
 “ in the amount of all allowances or compensa-  
 “ tions granted or allowed as retired allowances  
 “ or superannuations to any person or persons  
 “ having held any office, place, or employment,  
 “ in any such public office or department, or  
 “ *having been employed in any manner in any*  
 “ *public services under such office or department,*  
 “ and specifying in every such account the time  
 “ and length of service of every such person, and  
 “ the amount of the salary or allowances received  
 “ by such person immediately preceding such  
 “ superannuation, and the nature of his services  
 “ and also specifying in every such account the  
 “ grounds upon which every such increase or di-  
 “ minution in the establishment of any such  
 “ public office or department, or of any such sa-  
 “ lary, emolument, allowance, compensation, or

“superannuation as aforesaid, shall have been made, granted, or allowed.”

There cannot be a doubt, that in this description of persons employed by a public office, the Letter-Carriers are included; and it is equally clear, that the annual return of accounts to Parliament is here made imperative on the heads of departments; but though I have made much enquiry, I have not yet been able to discover any such return from the Post-Office of the Letter-Carriers' fund. The preamble to the Act distinctly describes its intention, and with respect to the scale of proportions to be observed in granting allowances to persons superannuated, its enactments cannot be mistaken. The following is the twelfth Section; “And be it further enacted, that the condition and proportion of such allowances, compensations, remunerations, or superannuations, be as follows: Where any officer shall be under sixty years of age, it shall not be lawful to grant any such allowance compensation, remuneration, or superannuation, unless upon certificate from the heads of the department to which such officer belongs, that such officer is incapable, from infirmity of mind or body, to discharge the duties of his office; in which case, if he shall have served with diligence and fidelity in the public service for ten years, it shall and may be lawful to grant to

“ him by way of superannuation, any annual sum  
 “ not exceeding one-third of the salary and emo-  
 “ luments of his office.—If above ten years and less  
 “ than twenty, any such sum not exceeding one-  
 “ half of such salary and emolument.—If above  
 “ twenty years, any such sum not exceeding two-  
 “ thirds of such salary and emoluments.—If such  
 “ officer shall be above sixty years of age, and he  
 “ shall have served fifteen years or upwards, it  
 “ shall and may be lawful, *although there shall be*  
 “ *no such certificate of incapacity, from infirmity*  
 “ *of body or mind*, to grant to him by way of su-  
 “ perannuation, any annual sum not exceeding  
 “ two-thirds of the salary and emoluments of his  
 “ office.” This last clause completely embraces  
 the case of Wood, except that the enumerated  
 conditions required to qualify for superannuation,  
 had with him been more than complied with.—  
 He was above sixty years of age; and instead of  
 fifteen, had then served twenty-six years. His  
 infirmity of body and mind, though in his case  
 wanting no certificate, was too obvious to be <sup>^</sup> doubted; and it remains for the Secretary to  
 show by what authority, such an application,  
 coming from such a man, was rejected. I can tell  
 Mr. Freeling, that to that fatal rejection, may be  
 truly traced the subsequent misfortunes, impris-  
 onment, and death of Wood; and the distress,  
 wretchedness, and ruin of his hapless family.  
 With the recollection of this melancholy truth

on my mind, I cannot help thinking, that it would have appeared more honorable in the Secretary himself, to have granted some relief to the widow out of his own immense salary and emoluments, than to have resisted her claims on the grounds of the capital conviction of her husband, and the rigid regulations of the Post-Office.\* If I have erred, by indulging too extravagant hopes of official humanity, I have erred on the right side ; and have at least the consolation to know, that I have been led astray by feelings, of which no man need ever be ashamed. The stern rigour of law demands justice ; but, thank God ! no law in England prohibits the workings of compassion, or the charities of Man, to his unfortunate, and suffering, fellow creatures.

Mr. Secretary Freeling is pleased to say, that the sums taken from the Letter-Carriers, “ constitute an Official Fund.” I am pleased to find he has baptized this singular establishment with some name, for to me it has always appeared a *non-descript*. I do not say this lightly,—for after careful and repeated enquiries at other public offices, I can find nothing that bears the slightest resemblance to this OFFICIAL FUND, either as it

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\* If capital conviction means, as I suppose it does, that sort of conviction to which the law has annexed the punishment of death, the Secretary is mistaken. Wood, it is true, was tried for a capital offence, but it is no less so, that he was acquitted.

may regard the source of supplies, the mode of collecting them, or their application. There are indeed to be found in other public offices, such things as extra-fees, perquisites, and emoluments; received either in consideration of additional trouble, of unusual dispatch, or superior skill. These things, though not perhaps in all cases strictly legal, have been so long tolerated by custom, that if not sanctioned by law, they are connived at by authority. But what can the Letter-Carriers do to deserve any other remuneration for their labour than their stated salary? Whether their customers choose to make them any little compliment or not, can neither add to, nor diminish from, their trouble in their daily deliveries. In either case, where the time for the performance of their duty is limited, dispatch can neither be quickened nor retarded; and though few men have a larger share of hard labour, it would be rather absurd, to talk of superior skill, in a profession, that affords no opportunities for its exercise. In all other public offices, there is the semblance of a right to *ask*,—with the Letter-Carrier, *none*. He may by his civility, indeed, attract the attention, and merit the regard of some generous individuals who, from the consideration of his small fixed salary and large family, are disposed to make him a trifling pecuniary present. But this is merely a pure charitable



“inspection.” But why use the word constantly? Is it meant by this, that they have something like an *occasional* right to inspect the particulars? This admission cannot be intended, for in Widow Wood’s Petition it is asserted that no Letter-Carrier is ever permitted to enquire into any thing connected with the management of this Fund, and the Secretary himself, in a subsequent part of his letter puts the matter beyond all doubt, where he says—“The accounts of the “Official Fund are laid before their Lordships “at stated periods, who in the exercise of their “discretion and *responsibility*, make such charges “upon it for the maintenance of superannuated “Letter-Carriers as appear to them expedient!” As Mr. Freeling has not condescended to say to whom the Post-Master General *is responsible* in this particular, I shall content myself with observing, that the word itself has a very pretty sound—it may be admirably chosen to round a parliamentary period, or embellish an Official communication; but in this case, I have no distinct idea of its meaning. I must, however, do the Post-Master General the justice to acknowledge, that I have for some time thought (and untill I am furnished with stronger reasons for changing my opinion, than any contained in the Secretary’s letter, I shall continue to think) his Lordship merely a nominal personage in this

business, who knows very little about the matter. But to show, that the Petition does not upon light grounds, assert that upwards of £4000 have been collected for this fund since its first establishment, more than could be wanted for the superannuated list.—Wood, put a paper into my hands, which purports to be a list of the walks and of the whole number of Letter-Carriers—the sums they respectively pay to this fund annually—the names and number of the superannuated, and the yearly allowance granted to each of them. The statements in this document, will I believe be found tolerably correct: and from them it appears, that the contributions from the whole body of Letter-Carriers in London to the Official Fund, amount to upwards of £2000 annually, and that amongst twenty-one superannuated members (the largest number ever known on the list,) there are distributed yearly in different proportions, varying from £80 to £31, the sum of £1278, leaving an unappropriated balance of £800 per year; which in seven years would produce a total, not of £4000, as in the Widow's Petition, but of upwards of £5000.

Thus is this *official*, or more properly speaking *sinking fund*, going on accumulating from the casual charity of the well-disposed. Not, as it should be, from any allowance granted from the Crown, or from a per-centage on fixed salary,

but flowing entirely from individual benevolence. To place the absurdity of such a system in its true light, let me suppose a possible case. It will be granted, that people are under no necessity to delay the delivery of their letters till after post-hours, merely to pay the Bell: nor are they under any obligation to give Christmas Boxes. Suppose, then, these sources of supply utterly to fail, the Letter-Carrier, in that case, instead of receiving any salary, would have to pay to the *Official Fund*, a contribution out of his own pocket, not from any injustice on his part, but because his customers have become so hard-hearted and inhuman, as to withhold their charity. The guinea a year, to be sure, for early deliveries would still remain; but as the right to demand even that, or any other sum for such service, is only sanctioned by a Post-Office regulation, this too may fail, and then the notable *Official Fund* dies a sudden death, and the superannuated Letter-Carrier left to shift for himself. If it were possible, that such a monstrous system as this could be continued, it might not be improper in some of the heads of the Post-Office, to address the young man seeking the place of a Letter-Carrier, in something like the following clear and candid terms. "Young man, you are about to enter on a service, where considerable sums of public money will daily pass

through your hands, for which trust we shall require sufficient securities. You are to pay all your letters to our Treasurer three times a week, and though you will be obliged in many cases to give a month's credit, and even longer, yet if you fail in the regularity of your payments, you will be instantly suspended, till either you or your securities make good the deficiency. You will be required to attend daily at the Post-Office at seven, and sometimes at six in the morning, and if you are a minute behind your time, you will be fined six-pence. After your morning delivery, you will have to collect evening letters, which occupations will keep you about eight hours each day on your legs. For this labour the Crown allows you Fourteen Shillings per week, and this being rather a stinted salary, to keep you honest, we give you the full liberty to make the most of your Evening Bell, of quarterly Houses, and of your Christmas Box. Some of those to whom you give credit may become insolvent, may run to the Isle of Man, or perchance may even die; but you are never to forget, that we make no allowance for losses of any kind. We are not, however, quite so squeamish about your gains; for we expect from you about one-third of your salary and perquisites to support an *Official Fund*, for the maintenance of some superannuated Letter-Carriers. Whether we expend the whole

or part of the money so collected, is no concern of your's. As to whom we *may* select, *when* we shall select, or *why* we shall select any person at all to participate in the benefits of this fund, these are matters only known to ourselves, and into which, you have no right to enquire. If your Bell should not produce a single penny,—if losses and bad debts should more than swallow up the produce of individual generosity,—all this is nothing to us—you *must* pay us yearly £36 for the Official Fund, in addition to the Property Tax. Learn above all things to become a sturdy beggar—let the fear of the gallows keep you honest, and look to charity and a good conscience for your best rewards. Always remember, that if you venture to steal you will certainly be *hanged*, and if you are not diligent in begging you will as certainly be *starved*. Such a system as this, has something in it, at once too grave for ridicule, and too ludicrous for gravity.

But, whatever cause of complaint this system of Post-Office management may have given to Wood, or to the Letter-Carriers generally, is comparatively of little importance, when contrasted with the great public interest involved in the consideration of the subject. Letter-Carriers, to be equal to the exact and faithful discharge of their duty, should be men of intelligence and activity, of some little property of their own, and

of strict and tried integrity. The first are requisite to correctness and dispatch in their employment, the second is wanting to enable them to give credit without failing in their stated payments, and the third is the best security for just and upright conduct. Men of this description, are not to be found among the lowest, or uninformed classes of society, and ought therefore to receive liberal encouragement for their services. Supposing the Letter-Carrier, from losses and disappointments, to which they are all exposed, should be unable to pay his contribution to this Official Fund, may not the dread of being suspended, tempt him to lay hands on what is not his own? Or should the charitable presents of individuals fail on one hand, and the wants of a family press hard on the other, what thoughts may not cross his mind, while the property of others are within his grasp? Without perfect confidence in the honesty of Letter-Carriers, commercial intercourse cannot be preserved, and to secure this inestimable advantage to a great trading country, like this, their rectitude should not unnecessarily be assailed by temptation. The principle, on which this Official Fund was originally formed, seems to have been that of squeezing as much as possible from each walk—whereas it should have been, not how much? but how little, that the Letter-Carrier might not be dis-

tracted by anxious and distressing cares, but left in easy and comfortable circumstances. The projectors of the new fund, when reckoning on the chances of charity, forgot, in the ardour of their zeal for its accomplishment, that the *giver* was a third party, over whose purse, as they had no controul, they could have no right to include in their calculation of returns. Let reason and justice, therefore, resume their power and influence over the councils of the Post-Office. Let the superannuated, who are worn out in the public service be, as they are in other offices, provided for by the bounty of the Crown. Acts of theft at the Post-Office, it is to be lamented are far from being rare occurrences. Alas! they are but too frequent! Within less than twelve short months we have had two convictions for this offence, and though individual depravity may in part account for these unhappy events, that system, which by increasing the difficulties of a Letter-Carrier's situation, gives force to temptation, is far from being calculated to prevent their recurrence. In this, the most important view that can be taken of the subject, the protection of the public, it will be seen, calls loudly for a *speedy*, and *salutary* change.

*FINIS.*







































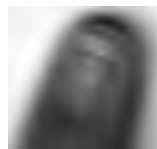






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